

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission
Nomination Report
719 S. Carrollton Ave, Carrollton Courthouse
January 23, 2019

Meeting Date: May 10, 2018
Property Address: 719 S. Carrollton Ave.
Owner: Carl Mittendorf
7800 N Stadium Dr
Houston, TX 77030
Architect: Henry Howard
Construction Date: 1855
Significance: Historic, Architectural, Cultural



Figure 1. 719 S. Carrollton Ave.



Figure 2. Detail from the Topographical Map of New Orleans and its Vicinity, Charles Zimpel, 1833

General History

In 1831, the town of Carrollton was established on the former site of the 32-arpent McCarty plantation by investors Laurent Millaudon, John Slidell, Samuel Kohn, and the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company; in 1833, Charles Zimpel was hired to divide the land into plots and squares.¹ It was reported in the Daily Picayune, in 1843, that, "(the) enterprising neighbors of Carrollton... have, in town meeting assembled, agreed to petition the Legislature to relieve them from sundry vexations and grievances under which they now labor, by granting them the right of incorporation."² The town officially incorporated in March 10, 1845, and largely served as a 'bedroom suburb' for the city of New Orleans.³ The growth of the town was exponential; in the decade between 1841 and 1851, the population grew by over 3,000%, fueled by the Jefferson and Lake Pontchartrain Railroad; trains ran every two hours, seven days a week.⁴ Carrollton became the parish seat for Jefferson Parish in 1852, which prompted, in 1854, a joint committee comprised of representatives from Jefferson Parish, the City of Jefferson, and the Town of Carrollton, to commission architect, Henry Howard to design a courthouse and jail to serve the Third Judicial Court of Jefferson Parish.⁵

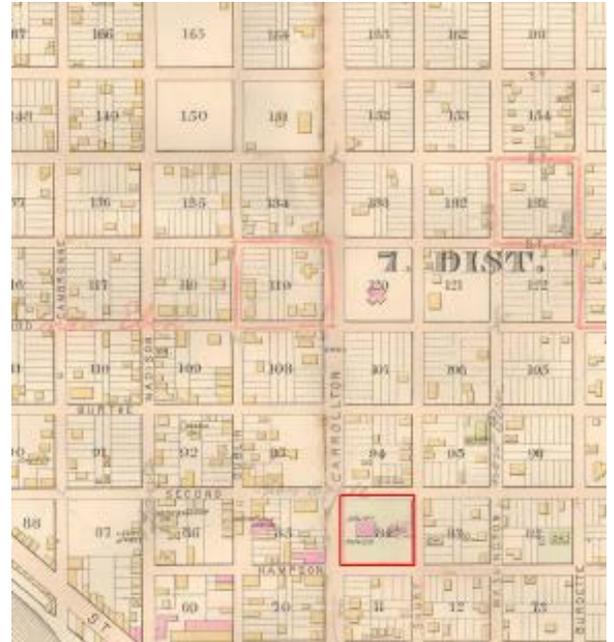


Figure 3. 1883 Robinson Atlas, Plate 27



Figure 4. Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississippi, 1858.

¹ (Swanson 2003, 105-106)

² (Times Picayune (published as The Daily Picayune) 1843, 1)

³ (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development 1987, 1, 5)

⁴ (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development 1987, 1)

⁵ (Swanson 2003, 105)

Howard signed a contract to design a courthouse and jail for the newly incorporated town of Carrollton on April 7, 1854.⁶ The Courthouse was built on the block of South Carrollton Ave., which is now bounded by Hampson, Maple, and Short Streets, formerly a plot of land, owned by Mr. G. C. Duncan,

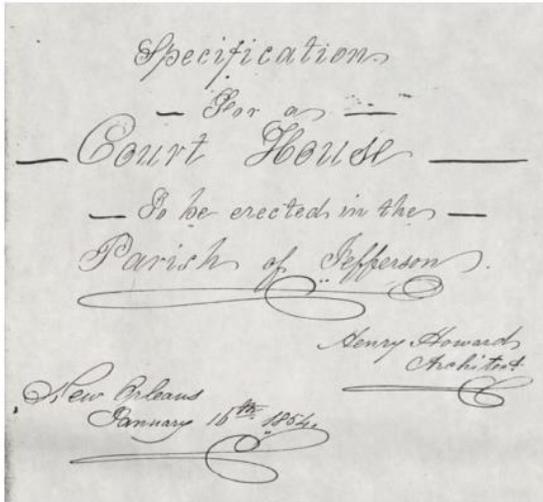


Figure 5. Original Building Specifications, 1854

which was purchased by the town of Carrollton for \$7,000.00 on December 12, 1853.⁷ Robert Crozier and Frederick Wing were brought on as the contractors, and the courthouse was built for a sum of \$59,000.00; construction was completed on October 6, 1855.⁸ The town's newspaper, the Carrollton Sun, exclaimed, "We are happy to inform our readers that the new courthouse is completed, and the officers have taken possession thereof."⁹

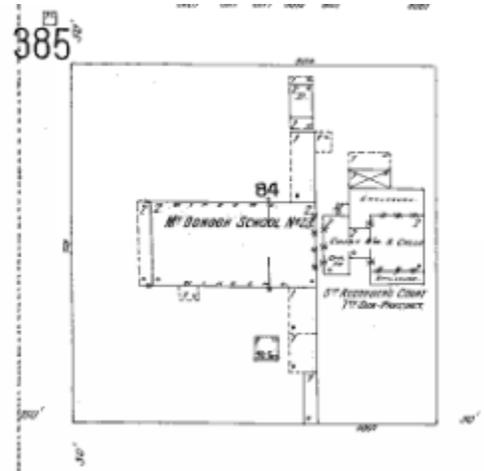


Figure 6. Sanborn Map, Vol.4, Sheet 389, 1896.

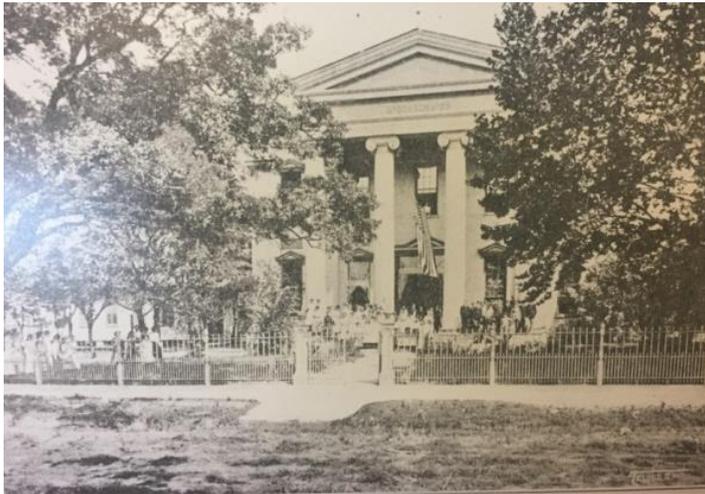


Figure 7. McDonough No.23, 1904

The courthouse was only four years old when Carrollton incorporated as a city and was named the seat of Jefferson Parish.¹⁰ In 1874, Carrollton was annexed to the City of New Orleans, and Act 71 of the Louisiana Legislature gave title of the building



Figure 8. Students at McDonough 23, 1892

⁶ (Brantley 2015, 124)

⁷ (Nuhran 1962, 2), (Brantley 2015, 124), (Act of Transfer by City of New Orleans to Orleans Parish School Board 1957)

⁸ (Nuhran 1962, 3), (Brantley 2015, 289)

⁹ (Nuhran 1962, 4)

¹⁰ (Nuhran 1962, 5)



Figure 10. School Children at McDonough No. 23, posing at side elevation of building, 1892

to the City.¹¹ Later that same year, the Courthouse was dedicated as McDonough No. 23, a public elementary school for the education of white children.¹² Act 91 of the Louisiana Legislature partitioned the property between Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, and on December 26, 1888, Mayor Joseph A. Shakespeare, representing the City of New Orleans, received title to the building and grounds from Austin Roundtree, of the Jefferson Parish Police Jury.¹³ The Board of Commissioners of the McDonough School Fund officially took title of the property from the City on May 28, 1889, with the stipulation that a portion of the property would remain a jail and a recorder's court, which it remained until the 1930's, when parents of the school children complained that "prisoners were boisterous and often ill-behaved, and the children could see and hear them from the school windows."¹⁴



Figure 9. J.C. Meynier Jr., of the Carrollton Citizens Committee, presenting landmark plaque to Victor H. Schiro, later Mayor of New Orleans, 1951

By 1950, the Courthouse was no longer being used as a school, but as a storage facility for school board furniture, prompting the Carrollton Citizens Committee to urge the City to re-establish ownership of the property.¹⁵ Citizens were incensed by rumors that the School Board was going to sell the property to a private developer, who planned to demolish the building to make way for an A&P grocery store.¹⁶ The attorney for the citizens committee argued that the original title transfer made it clear that the building was to be used for education, and a warehouse did not meet the terms established therein.¹⁷ On August 22, 1951, at the home of Angela Gregory, the Carrollton Citizens Committee, headed by J. Charles Meynier, Jr. – later named the honorary mayor of Carrollton - set forth the main objectives of their group: "preservation of the courthouse and its utilization for a

¹¹ (Act of Transfer by City of New Orleans to Orleans Parish School Board 1957)

¹² (Nuhra 1962, 5)

¹³ (Nuhra 1962, 5)

¹⁴ (Nuhra 1962), (Times-Picayune 1932, 3)

¹⁵ (Nuhra 1962, 6), (New Orleans States 1954, 35)

¹⁶ (Nuhra 1962, 6), (Lipinski, LSU, Tulane to study use for threatened Carrollton Courthouse 2015)

¹⁷ (New Orleans States 1954, 35)

worthwhile purpose."¹⁸ A petition with 2,069 signatures protesting the School Board's use of the building, and requesting that building be designated as a landmark, was presented to the City in 1952 along with a bronze plaque dedicated by the Citizens Committee and the Louisiana Landmarks Society.¹⁹ In 1954, the Louisiana Historical Society added the building to its list of "outstanding architectural masterpieces in New Orleans".²⁰

In 1954, Mayor Chep Morrison asked the School Board to vacate the premises, and the building bounced around City departments throughout the mid-1950's; NORD used the playground while NOFD held drills in the Courthouse, itself.²¹ In 1955, the head of NORD even argued for the demolition of the building, and installation of quonset huts on the site.²² Meanwhile, Meynier, of the Carrollton Citizens Committee pled with the School Board, the City, and the State to preserve, "every brick and nail of the courthouse."²³ Luckily, in February of 1957, the School Board voted to renovate the building and dedicate it as Benjamin Franklin Senior High School.²⁴

Benjamin Franklin Senior High School seemed to outgrow the location rather quickly, however. By 1975, new sites were being scouted for the school.²⁵ The State sent out an accreditation warning in 1976, because of inadequate facilities, and in lieu of that development, the Carrollton Businessmen's Association petitioned the School Board to sell the building so that it could be used as a museum or community center.²⁶ For a decade, the community worried about what would happen when the School Board moved the high school out of the old Courthouse. There was a distinct worry that a developer might demolish this "jewel of... Uptown."²⁷

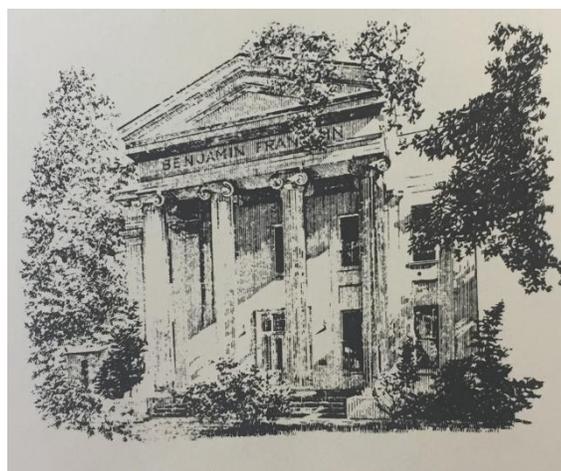


Figure 11. Benjamin Franklin High School, drawing, undated

In 1987, construction started on a new school for Benjamin Franklin on Leon C Simon Boulevard, and community members gathered at the Courthouse to discuss the future of the site.²⁸ At this meeting, "Woody" Koppel, a school board representative, and Sandra Levy, director of the Historic Districts Landmarks Commission, suggested that the citizen's group "document the historic importance of the building," and "explore the possibility of a restrictive

¹⁸ (Nuhran 1962, 6), (Kent 1980, 14)

¹⁹ (Nuhran 1962, 7)

²⁰ (Nuhran 1962, 8)

²¹ (Nuhran 1962, 9), (New Orleans States 1954, 3), (New Orleans Item 1955, 17)

²² (Nuhran 1962, 9)

²³ (Nuhran 1962, 9)

²⁴ (Nuhran 1962, 10)

²⁵ (Boyd, Ben Franklin High Isn't For Sale - Yet 1976, 2)

²⁶ (Boyd, Ben Franklin High Isn't For Sale - Yet 1976, 2), (Boyd, N.O. Public School Flagship in Danger of Capsizing 1976, 1)

²⁷ (Roehl 1987, 9)

²⁸ (Roehl 1987, 9)

covenant to protect the... building,” by effectively limiting who could bid on the property.²⁹ Levy noted that the Courthouse was “one of the most significant buildings in the Carrollton area.”³⁰ Nevertheless, the building stayed under School Board control.

In 1990, Lusher Elementary school, whose main campus was on Willow St, expanded its sixth grade class into the building, followed by seventh and eighth grades in subsequent years. After Hurricane Katrina, Lusher moved out and the Audubon Extension School moved in until 2014, when they moved into the former McDonogh 7 campus.³¹ In September of that year, the School Board put the Courthouse up for auction amongst charter schools, and received no bids; it was at this point that the possibility of a public auction was once again raised.³²

Worries about the plans of private developers disturbed citizens, yet again. In 2015, the Courthouse was named as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the president of that organization, Stephanie Meeks, noted, ““The Carrollton Courthouse is a beloved landmark with a rich tradition of serving the community... It deserves to have a special place in New Orleans' future. We urge the Orleans Parish School Board to join preservationists in planning the next phase for the Carrollton Courthouse to ensure its legacy continues.”³³ On January 13, 2017, an online fundraising campaign called the “Help Save the Historic Carrollton Courthouse” was started with the intention of creating a non-profit trust to “attain ownership of the courthouse property from the school board.”³⁴ The Louisiana Landmarks Society posted a “Save The Courthouse” petition on their website, and named it one of the “New Orleans Nine” most endangered sites in the City.³⁵ The Courthouse was sold at auction on March 23, 2017, for \$4.7 million dollars, to a private developer.³⁶



Figure 12. “Save Carrollton Courthouse” – this logo appeared on yard signs citywide, 2015

Cultural, Political, Economic, or Social History of the Nation, State, or Community

The Carrollton Courthouse is one of the most important relics of the Carrollton neighborhood's time as an independent city, and as the seat of Jefferson parish. As a courthouse, it was the site of a legal ruling in the matter of Joseph Tom v. Slave Ernest, which ultimately affirmed the personhood of slaves in 1860, stating that, “a slave is not a thing.”³⁷ The Courthouse housed Benjamin Franklin High School,

²⁹ (Roehl 1987, 9)

³⁰ (Roehl 1987, 9)

³¹ (Lipinski, Carrollton Courthouse Auction Tentatively Scheduled For May 2015)

³² (Lipinski, Carrollton Courthouse Auction Tentatively Scheduled For May 2015)

³³ (11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2015)

³⁴ (Lipinski, Carrollton Courthouse Auction Tentatively Scheduled For May 2015)

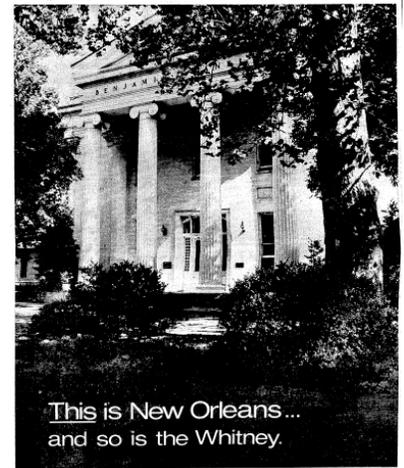
³⁵ (Langenhenning 2015)

³⁶ (Morris 2017)

³⁷ (Louisiana Supreme Court 1861)

which in 1963, was the first public high school in New Orleans to integrate; in a landmark 1960 ruling, the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth District ruled that Franklin was “one of the finest schools in the country for superior students” and should be open to all students in New Orleans, regardless of race.³⁸

Throughout the years, the Carrollton Courthouse has been recognized as a landmark: it appears as a must see location in the WPA's 1938 guidebook to the city, was called a “priceless possession” by Mayor Schiro in 1962, and even appears in advertisements as an emblematic symbol of the city, itself.³⁹ The Courthouse was listed as the first “Principal Landmark” of the Carrollton neighborhood in the neighborhood's National Historic Register Database report from 1987.⁴⁰



Embody Distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship

Today Carrollton is one of the loveliest neighborhoods in metropolitan New Orleans—pleasant, quiet and secure. But before 1874, Carrollton was a neighborhood of independent municipalities and the parish seat of Jefferson. The handsome Carrollton Courthouse was then not only the center of government, but the center of activity as well. With its imposing facade and its grand columns, it was typical of early Southern courthouse architecture. Shortly after the turn of the century, the Whitney joined the Carrollton community by opening a branch bank at the busy corner of Carrollton Avenue and Oak Street. Like the Carrollton Courthouse, the Whitney has grown to be a vital part of the city, with a continuing interest in all of New Orleans' neighbors and neighborhoods alike.



The Carrollton Courthouse is a two-story, Greek Revival, stucco over masonry structure with fluted Erechtheion Ionic columns soaring towards

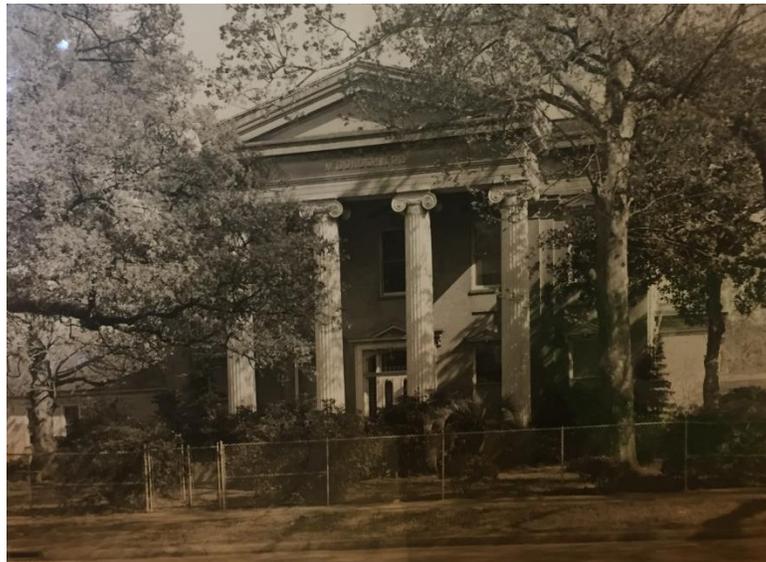


Figure 14. McDonough No. 23, 1948.

Figure 13. Whitney Bank ad, 1972

a rather heavy entablature. The lack of galleries and relatively long narrow windows emphasize the overall verticality of the building while the squat pediment adds an almost playful and lighthearted balance. The stucco on the exterior is jointed, the joints lined in “chocolate oil paint” to mimic masonry.⁴¹ The bases and capitals of the columns and pilasters are cast iron.⁴² At some point between 1948 and 1955, the pedimented lintels over the windows and doors –clearly seen in older photos - were removed and are no longer present.⁴³

The building manages to be monumental yet light. In its design, it's easy to trace Howard's inspiration from the Greek Revival style that was popular

³⁸ (Benjamin Franklin High School: Mission and History n.d.)

³⁹ (The Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration 1938), (Whitney National Bank of New Orleans 1974), (Nuhran 1962)

⁴⁰ (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development 1987)

⁴¹ (Brantley 2015, 124)

⁴² (Swanson 2003, 106-107)

⁴³ (Swanson 2003, 106-107)

in the US South at the time to the contemporary, Irish neo-classical movement of Howard's homeland.⁴⁴ Richard Brantley, Henry Howard's biographer notes that what we see in Howard's designs are "a touch of Irish neoclassicism on the Mississippi River."

Representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual ability has been recognized.

Henry Howard was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1818, and immigrated to New York City in search of an architectural mentor in 1836; he stayed just a year before coming to New Orleans, in September of 1837.⁴⁵ In New Orleans, Howard found the mentors he had been searching for in Edward W. Sewell, Henry Mollhausen, and James H. Dakin. Howard opened his own office at 97 Common Street, in 1844, which



Figure 15. Front elevation of courthouse, 2015

developed into a thriving and eclectic architectural practice; he worked on residential, commercial, and civic buildings using

a variety of styles and materials.⁴⁶ Among Howard's notable works are the Woodlawn, Madewood, and Belle Grove Plantations, and the Pontalba Buildings (formerly exclusively attributed to James Gallier) in Jackson Square.

Howard was commissioned to build the Carrollton Courthouse in 1854, eighteen years after arriving in New Orleans.⁴⁷ Of the six buildings that Henry Howard designed in 1854, the Carrollton Courthouse is the only one left standing as of 2017.⁴⁸ While exact numbers are difficult because of issues of documentation, it's thought that Howard designed roughly three hundred buildings in Louisiana; less than a hundred of which are extant at present.⁴⁹ Howard was a popular and influential architect of his day; when he died in 1884, the New York Times ran his obituary on the front page.⁵⁰



Figure 16. Carrollton Courthouse, 2015

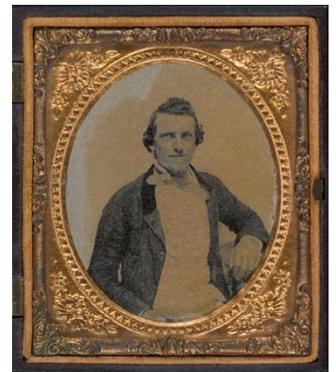


Figure 17. Henry Howard, ambrotype, 1856

⁴⁴ (Brantley 2015, 17-22)

⁴⁵ (Brantley 2015, 16)

⁴⁶ (Brantley 2015, 38)

⁴⁷ (Brantley 2015, 17-19)

⁴⁸ (Brantley 2015, 289)

⁴⁹ (Brantley 2015, 288), (Tulane MPS Studio 2015)

⁵⁰ (Brantley 2015, 16)

Staff Recommendation

Due to the overwhelming evidence regarding the historic, architectural, and cultural significance, the staff recommends that the Carrollton Courthouse be nominated for study as a local landmark.



Figure 18. McDonough 23, undated (early 1900's)

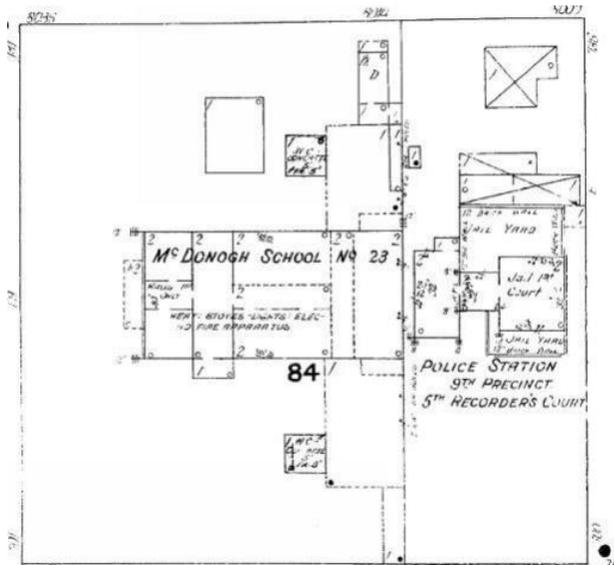


Figure 19. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1909

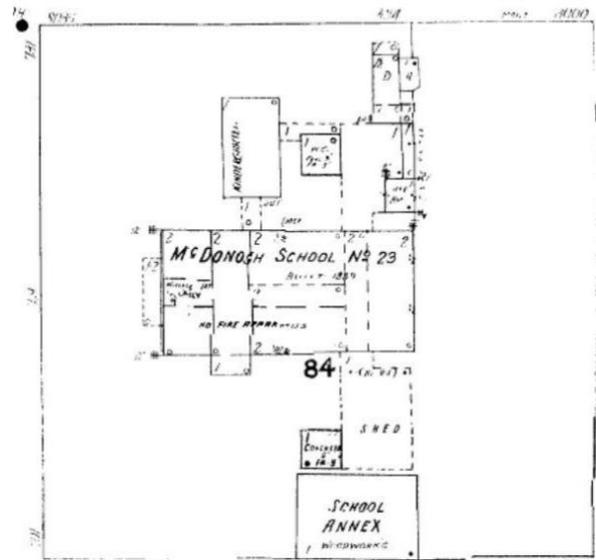


Figure 19. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951

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Figure Attribution

Figure 1. Author's Own, May28, 2017.

Figure 2. Detail from the Topographical Map of New Orleans and its Vicinity, Charles Zimpel, 1833.

Figure 3. "Robinson's Atlas of the City of New Orleans, Louisiana," Plate 27,
<http://www.orleanscivilclerk.com/robinson/guide.htm>

Figure 4. Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississppi, 1858.

Figure 5. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Vol.4, Sheet 389, 1896.

Figure 6. "Original Building Specifications, 1854," Tulane MPS Studio. *The Carrollton Courthouse: A Public Space*. Fall 2015. <https://carrolltoncourthouse.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/2016-carrollton-courthouse-presentation-doc.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2017).

Figure 7. "McDonough 23, 1904," OPSB-147, Audio Visual, Photographs-Schools, Box 16, McDonough #15-#27, Orleans Parish School Board Archives, University of New Orleans.

Figure 8. "Students at McDonough 23, 1892," OPSB-147, Audio Visual, Photographs-Schools, Box 16, McDonough #15-#27, Orleans Parish School Board Archives, University of New Orleans.

Figure 9. "Schoolchildren, 1894," OPSB-147, Audio Visual, Photographs-Schools, Box 16, McDonough #15-#27, Orleans Parish School Board Archives, University of New Orleans.

Figure 10. Nuhran, George. *Carrollton Courthouse 1856-1962*. New Orleans: Pelican Print, 1962.

Figure 11. "Benjamin Franklin High School," OPSB-147, Audio Visual, Photographs-Schools, Box 16, McDonough #15-#27, Orleans Parish School Board Archives, University of New Orleans.

Figure 12. "Save Carrollton Courthouse," Louisiana Landmarks Society, Save the Carrollton Courthouse, <http://www.louisianalandmarks.org/preserve/save-carrollton-courthouse>.

Figure 13. McDonough 23, OPSB-147, Audio Visual, Photographs-Schools, Box 16, McDonough #15-#27, Orleans Parish School Board Archives, University of New Orleans.

Figure 14. Whitney Bank advertisement, New Orleans States- Item, December 9, 1974.

Figure 15. *Carrollton Courthouse, 2015*, Brantley, Robert. Henry Howard; Louisiana's Architect. New York: Princeton Architectural press, 2015.

Figure 16. Front elevation of courthouse, "Elevation Comparisons," Tulane MPS Studio. *The Carrollton Courthouse: A Public Space*. Fall 2015. <https://carrolltoncourthouse.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/2016-carrollton-courthouse-presentation-doc.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2017).

Figure 17. Henry Howard Ambrotype, Brantley, Robert. Henry Howard; Louisiana's Architect. New York: Princeton Architectural press, 2015.

Figure 18. McDonough 23, Tulane MPS Studio. *The Carrollton Courthouse: A Public Space*. Fall 2015. <https://carrolltoncourthouse.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/2016-carrollton-courthouse-presentation-doc.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2017).

Figure 19. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1909.

Figure 20. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951.

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